



Craigmount High School

aim high · adapt · succeed



Techniques to support Positive Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

What you need to know

If you are experiencing anxiety, you are normal. There is no one who doesn't feel anxious at some time. It is even more common to feel anxious during adolescence, because so many changes are taking place in your body, your mind, and your emotions.

There is one thing that the activities have in common: they won't help if you do them just once. They are tools, intended for you to carry with you and use over and over throughout your life. The more you practice using them, the better you will become at managing anxiety.

Try to be patient with yourself as you take steps to improve your ability to manage, accept and overcome your anxiety.

Anxiety Explained

The feeling of anxiety has been described with many different words. Here are some of them:

stress	edginess	apprehension	the jitters	worry
jumpiness	panic	fear	butterflies	uneasiness
nervousness	freaking out	disquiet	agitation	angst

While everyone experiences anxiety, some of us feel it more often, some more deeply, some less frequently, and some less intensely. Your own experience of anxiety will depend on:

- Genetics—how your parents, grandparents, and ancestors experienced anxiety.
- Brain chemistry—the type, amount, and movement of the chemicals working in your brain.
- Life events—the situations you are faced with in your life.
- Personality—how you look at and interpret things that happen to you.

Genetics, brain chemistry, and life events are factors that you have little or no control over. Your personality, or the way you perceive and handle life events, is something you have a great deal of control over—probably more than you realise.

5 point sensory scale

5: Acknowledge FIVE things you see around you. Maybe it is a bird, maybe it is pencil, maybe it is a spot on the ceiling, however big or small, state 5 things you see.

4: Acknowledge FOUR things you can touch around you. Maybe this is your hair, hands, ground, grass, pillow, etc, whatever it may be, list out the 4 things you can feel.

3: Acknowledge THREE things you hear. This needs to be external, do not focus on your thoughts; maybe you can hear a clock, a car, a dog park. or maybe you hear your tummy rumbling, internal noises that make external sounds can count, what is audible in the moment is what you list.

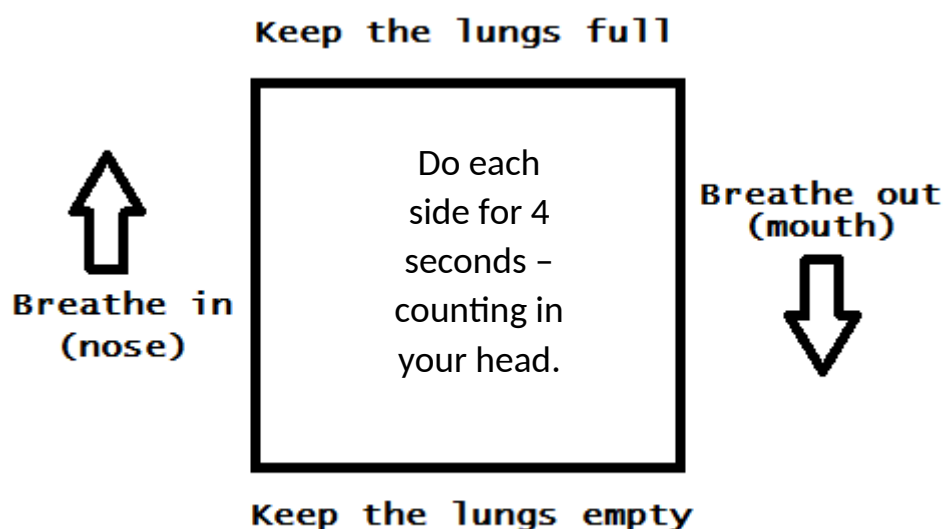
2: Acknowledge TWO things you can smell: This one might be hard if you are not in a stimulating environment, if you cannot automatically sniff something out, walk nearby to find a scent. Maybe you walk to your bathroom to smell soap or outside to smell anything in nature, or even could be as simple as leaning over and smelling a pillow on the couch, or a pencil. Whatever it may be, take in the smells around you.

1: Acknowledge ONE thing you can taste. What does the inside of your mouth taste like, gum, coffee, or the sandwich from lunch? Focus on your mouth as the last step and take in what you can taste.

0: Take a big deep breath in through the nose, to your diaphragm and out through your mouth.

Box breathing

Try this if you are feeling: anxious, angry, frustrated, nervous, upset, irritated etc.





The Bigger Picture

Consider the following scenario -

A pupil was feeling anxious because their Maths teacher had asked them to be the first one to give their presentation to the class the next day. The pupil's older sibling knew there was something wrong and asked what was wrong. The pupil said they were worried about the presentation. The older sibling told them to look at the bigger picture: the pupil was achieving a level B in the class already, the teacher liked them and knew they were a hard worker and the pupil was well prepared for the presentation with notes. They told their younger sibling that if they did it first it would be out of the way and they could relax for the rest of the time in Maths. When they considered this in 'the bigger picture' they felt much calmer and more in control.

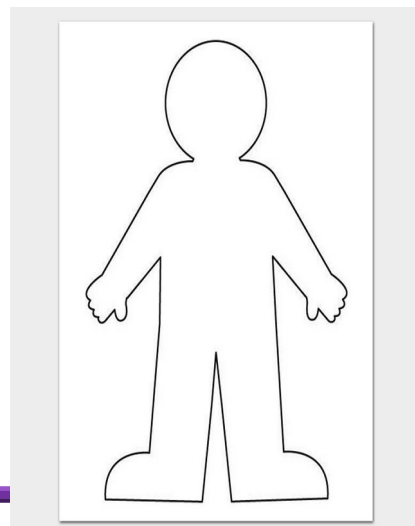
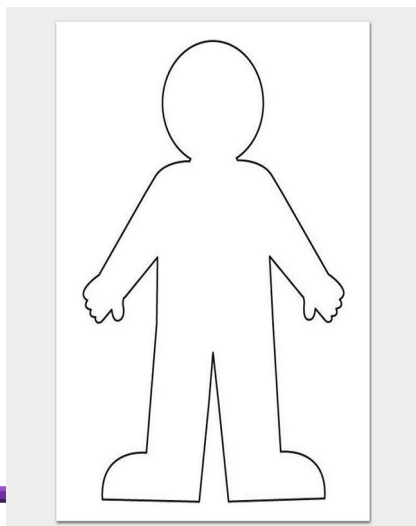
The pictures below emphasis the difference of stopping and thinking about the bigger picture, this allowing things to be put into perspective and appearing more achievable;



When you find yourself in a situation where you feel overwhelmed and are experiencing feelings of anxiety draw or write in the box, as if you were looking at yourself in the situation from 'the bigger picture'. Putting this down on paper will help you see the positives and make the task which is causing you anxiety, more achievable.

Inside.....

Outside.....





Relaxed Stretching

When you stretch your muscles, you help to take away the stress chemicals that have collected in them and you increase the blood circulation in your body, both of which help relieve anxiety. If you breathe peacefully and deeply while you stretch, you help bring oxygen to all of your muscle groups, also relieving anxiety.

Stretching is one of the easiest anxiety-reducing techniques you can use because you can stretch almost any muscle group at any time, almost anywhere you are.

It is important to stretch slowly and gently so that you don't overextend your muscles. If you stretch a little every day on a regular basis, you will help keep your anxiety level low. If you take a stretching break when you are feeling particularly tense about something, it will help you release and manage feelings of anxiety.

You can use the scale below or do it in your head, rate yourself 1-10 (1- calm and collected to 10 - very tense and anxious) before and after you stretch, with the hope being that you feel more in control of your emotions after your stretching.

Relaxed Stretching

Anxiety level before one session of relaxed stretching:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Anxiety level after one session of relaxed stretching:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A to Z

Sometimes we need to take our focus off what is causing us anxiety and stress to allow our minds time to rest and focus on something else. This can allow us to remove our focus from the challenging situation for a period of time, taking our mind somewhere else, and when returning to the challenging situation, being able to put it in perspective.

Lists from A-Z of different things was one of the techniques we discussed - animals, food, countries etc;

- | | |
|-----|-----|
| A - | N - |
| B - | O - |
| C - | P - |
| D - | Q - |
| E - | R - |
| F - | S - |
| G - | T - |
| H - | U - |

I -
J -
K -
L -
M -

V -
W -
X -
Y -
Z -

Progressive Relaxation

Sit in a comfortable position and loosen any tight clothing so that you don't feel cramped and can breathe easily. You may lie down if you wish, as long as you know you won't fall asleep. Before you start, rate your anxiety level on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 being completely peaceful and 10 being highly anxious). Write your number down, tell it to another person, or remember it so you can use it later.

Close your eyes and for a few minutes put your attention on your breath. You don't have to try to change your breathing at all—simply notice it. Instead of trying to direct your breath, just follow it. All you have to do is notice where it is at any moment and where it goes at the next moment. As you inhale and exhale, your breath may move in and out of your mouth or nostrils; it may move into your throat, neck, or lungs or even down into your diaphragm. Your breath may make your shoulders rise and fall or your chest move up and down. It may cause a tickle or a light sensation in your body at any point. There is no right or wrong way to experience your breath; just notice where it goes and continue to follow it.

When your breath becomes rhythmic and even, move your attention to the top of your head. Notice if you are holding any tension around your facial area or the muscles surrounding your skull. Imagine all of this tension leaving your head and being pulled out into the air around you. After it leaves your head, it simply floats away off into space. You notice that your forehead, your cheeks, your chin, and your jaw are all completely free of tension and relaxed. Your face and jaw are so relaxed that your mouth may drop open a little.

Now move your attention to your neck. Picture any tension that you may be holding in the back or front of your neck as leaving your body and floating off into space. Consciously release the muscles in your neck and let go of any tension in this area.

Next, pay attention to your shoulders and upper back. Notice if you are holding any tension here. Many people hold anxiety in these areas. Consciously release any tension you are holding here. Feel the release and relief as you let the tension go. Feel your shoulders drop a little as the tension leaves your body.

Move your attention now to your chest and lungs. Know that you are releasing any and all tension from this area of your body. Your lungs are contracting and expanding freely. Your chest is rising and falling peacefully and rhythmically as you breathe. Any tension that was in your chest or lungs has now left. Your muscles here are completely relaxed.

Next, focus on your upper arms. Picture the muscles in your arms relaxing. These muscles work hard each day, helping you lift and carry. Right now they don't have to do anything, so let them relax. Release any tension that you might be holding in your upper arms and then in your lower arms and your hands and fingers. Concentrate on releasing any tightness you may be carrying anywhere along your arms. Picture the tension simply flowing down your arms and out the ends of your fingertips. Your arms are now completely relaxed.

Move your focus to your stomach. It is common for people to feel tightness or “knots” in their stomach when they are anxious. Pay attention to your stomach muscles and consciously relax them. Each time you exhale, let them become more and more limp, until you feel your stomach “sinking” comfortably into your body. Know that any tension in your stomach is now gone, and your stomach is completely relaxed.

Progressive Relaxation con't

Now place your attention on your lower back and hips. Release any tension you may be feeling in these areas. Let your hips feel warm and heavy, and feel them sinking comfortably into the chair beneath you. Let the muscles in your lower back and hips relax completely and notice how good this feels.

Next, move your attention to your upper legs. There are large muscles in your thighs that carry you from place to place every day. They don't need to do any work right now, so you can let them relax completely. Let your upper legs feel warm and heavy. Let them sink into the chair beneath you as you release all the tension from this area of your body. Notice how relaxed your thighs are now.

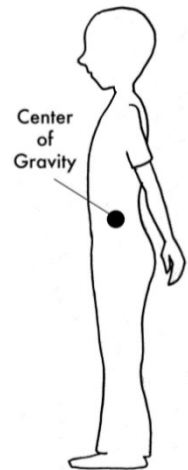
Move down your legs to your knees and calves, your feet and toes. These body parts also work hard to hold you up every day. They can be completely relaxed now. Consciously let any tension go from these muscle groups and joints. Picture the tension flowing easily out of your legs and your feet and out the tips of your toes. Let all of this tension disappear into the air around you.

Now sit quietly for a few minutes and enjoy the relaxation you have allowed in your body. Notice what it's like to be this relaxed. Rate your anxiety level once again, as you did before you started this exercise. Notice if your number has gone up, down, or stayed the same. When you are ready, bring your attention back to the room you are in, and open your eyes.

Centre of you

Stand straight with both feet flat and solidly on the floor, shoulder-width apart. Close your eyes. Adjust yourself so that you feel balanced. Place your attention on your physical body. Without moving or touching your right hand, put your attention on it. Now without moving or touching your left knee, put your attention on it. Next, without moving or touching your navel, put your attention on it. Now be aware of a spot an inch or two behind and two or three inches below your navel, in the back centre of your abdomen. With your eyes closed, try to get a sense of this inner spot that is the centre of gravity of your body.

Keep your attention focused on this point. Imagine yourself drawing in all your scattered energy and concentrating it here. Continue to focus your energy here for a few minutes until you feel stable and balanced.



Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the act of keeping your focus on the present moment which helps ground you and prevents you worrying about things in the future which may cause anxiety.

Exercise 1

Choose a simple activity that you can do in the next few hours to practice mindfulness. It could be anything from eating a packet of crisps to getting dressed to lying on your bed listening to music. Make a conscious effort to perform this activity with mindfulness.

As you perform the actions, try to keep your attention focused only on what you are doing right at that moment. Use all your five senses to experience the activity. Pay close attention to exactly what you are seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting as you do this.

Exercise 2

One way to help yourself stay focused is to talk to yourself silently as you perform each activity, simply reminding yourself of what you are doing at the time. For example, as you are eating chips, think to yourself, "Eating, I am eating." As you are getting dressed, think to yourself, "Dressing, I am dressing." It will probably seem a little strange at first, but it will help keep your mind focussed on the present and off anxious thoughts.

Exercise 3

As you go through the day, whenever you notice yourself feeling anxious because you have moved your thinking into the future or the past, simply remind yourself, "Come back to the present." Then move your mind away from wherever it has wandered to and bring it back to what you are doing right now, using the above techniques to help you do this.